5. Birth

Intercourse stops at the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy, and normally is not resumed till about six months after the birth of the child. When the woman's time has come, she cut the "navel-string", and the husband must then keep elsewhere, either building himself a rough shelter or living with one of his neighbours in the settlement. During the act of birth the woman is helped by a midwife, sometimes and her mother is present if possible. She stays for six or seven days in the hut after giving birth, and may then see her husband in the day time when she "cleans out the hut". The child's body must be kept covered for several weeks after its birth, and only its face may be seen, even by the father. At this stage the mother must be purified by her husband, who kills a goat (which he must buy or steal if he has none of his own), and rubs the fat and undigested grass from its stomach (*nyati*) over her face, breasts and belly. After about three months the husband may come back to live in the new hut.

The birth of twins is not liked, for they are abnormal, and the old men say, *nzeve ano nzeve kamue* ("they are bad because they make the mother useless"). If the father should have set a trap at the time when twins are born to him, it is believed that that trap will never catch an animal. The most unfavourable omen caused by the birth of twins is removed by the killing of a goat (which the husband must get by any means if he owns none) to be eaten by the mother and her female friends.

A girl who has a child before marriage is called, as among the Kamba, *mwanaisi*, and becomes unclean ritually as a result. She may be purified, however, by the man responsible or one of his male relatives who must kill a he-goat. The meat is eaten by the men and women of the settlement, but not by the girl; and the stick or undigested grass from the stomach is rubbed by one of the women over her face, neck, and breasts, and then washed off. By this means she becomes clean again, unlike such people among the Kamba, who remain unclean all their lives.

A baby is suckled as a rule until the mother is well advanced into her next pregnancy; the standard period was given as "twelve months". If the mother has no milk, or not enough, she goes about begging for milk, *mwati nda*; but as often as not in such cases the baby dies of starvation. It is weaned by being dipped when it tries to suck, and by the application to the nipple of something bitter, generally a concoction made from the root of a bush called *kothoni* (Kamba, *kitumati*). At this time it is fed with milk from a small gourd, and if no milk can be got, it is given honey instead. It is also given bits of meat cut up small and fed from a spoon made of a piece of gourd; and gruel made from maize or sometimes meal mixed with honey.

If the mother dies in child-birth, her husband's mother or some other female relative takes charge of the baby and feeds it with milk from a small horn: if milk cannot be got, honey and gruel are tried; but very small babies fed in this way seldom live. Sometimes the child may be adopted by a married couple.

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